



# HEALTH PROFILE: MEXICO

## HIV/AIDS

Estimated Number of Adults and Children Living with HIV/AIDS (end 2003)	160,000 (low-high estimates 78,000-260,000)
Total Population (2004)	104.931 million
Adult HIV Prevalence (end 2003)	0.3%
HIV-I Seroprevalence in Urban Areas	
Population most at risk (i.e., sex workers and clients, patients seeking treatment for sexually transmitted infections, or others with known risk factors)	0.3%
Population least at risk (i.e., pregnant women, blood donors, or others with no known risk factors)	0.1%

Sources: UNAIDS, U.S. Census Bureau, PAHO

Based on estimates by the Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS (UNAIDS), 160,000 people in Mexico were living with HIV/AIDS at the end of 2003, indicating a national adult prevalence of 0.3% and comprising 10% of all estimated HIV/AIDS cases in Latin America. According to the National Registry of AIDS cases, 91.4% of reported cases are the result of sexual transmission. The USAID program focuses on reducing the risk of HIV transmission among the most vulnerable populations by supporting behavior change and commercial condom distribution as well as promoting positive policy change, multisectoral participation, stigma reduction, and equitable workplace policies. The epidemic is still largely concentrated among men who have sex with men. The male-to-female infection ratio is 6:1. Recently, however, a gradual shift is occurring toward higher rates of infection among both injecting drug users and women. Rates are also rising among female sex workers.

Most infections are found among those aged 25 to 34. Although AIDS is the 16th leading cause of death among the general population in Mexico, it jumps to fourth among men between the ages of 25 and 34, and seventh among women in the same age group.

Population mobility is a factor in HIV/AIDS transmission in Mexico. A high volume of cross-border activity, including immigration from Central America and the influx of those returning from migrant work in the United States, has contributed to the spread of the epidemic. Therefore, recent public health initiatives, such as the Health Border Initiative 2010 (see USAID Support that follows), are building community-based programs to reduce cross-border transmission and related risky behaviors such as substance abuse.

HIV/AIDS in Mexico is transmitted primarily through sexual contact among the most vulnerable populations. In 2004, UNAIDS reported that 37% of AIDS cases were attributed to transmission via men who have sex with men, 22% to heterosexual contact, and another 37% to unknown causes. Heterosexual transmission is increasing, however, and in some southern states (Tlaxcala, Puebla, Chiapas, and Hidalgo) it is now the predominant mode of transmission. In 2000, high prevalence (17%) was also found among patients being treated for sexually transmitted infections in Mexico City. HIV-infection rates among commercial sex workers and injecting drug users remain relatively low, with values below 3% (in 1999 and in 2000) in different sites across the country.

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## NATIONAL RESPONSE

Mexico has specific policies on the response to HIV/AIDS, including access to care. The Ministry of Health's National AIDS Program (CENSIDA), active since 1988, collaborates with other government ministries and with civil society organizations. It also works closely with more than 300 nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) in Mexico, including organizations of people living with HIV/AIDS. This collaboration is considered a significant asset in the national response to HIV/AIDS, because a

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coordinated response between government and civil society has proven to be a more effective response than government entities acting alone in building and maintaining strong links with vulnerable populations.

In line with Mexico's National Strategic Plan for 2001–2006, CENSIDA's program activities focus primarily on:

- Prevention of HIV/AIDS through sexual, blood, and mother-to-child transmission
- Care and treatment of people living with HIV/AIDS
- Mitigation of social and economic impacts of HIV/AIDS
- Reduction of stigma and protection of the rights of people living with HIV/AIDS

With more than 77% of the Mexican population living in urban areas, most national HIV-prevention programs are based in urban areas and focus on urban populations. A drawback to this approach is that people in rural areas of Mexico often lack access to testing and prevention information and may be unaware of their HIV status.

The Government of Mexico is committed to providing universal access to antiretroviral therapy and to combating the stigma and discrimination that often serve as barriers to seeking testing and treatment. These efforts are in line with the "Neuvo Leon Declaration"—a pledge endorsed by regional heads of state at the 2004 Special Summit of the Americas in Monterrey, Mexico, to cover at least 600,000 people by the end of 2005—and the broader World Health Organization (WHO) initiative ("3x5") to cover 3 million people by the end of 2005.

Other initiatives that contribute to HIV/AIDS prevention and surveillance include the World Bank Procedes Project, which has earmarked \$12 million from an existing health agreement to HIV/AIDS activities.

## USAID SUPPORT

The United States Agency for International Development (USAID) works with Mexico to address shared challenges and mutual interests, and health is one of these key areas. Mexico is an important partner for the United States in HIV/AIDS prevention based on the important links between our countries with respect to trade, tourism, education, and family ties. Diseases do not respect borders, and with the movement of people between the two countries, prevention efforts in one country will inevitably have an impact on the other.

Mexico's AIDS epidemic has not yet spread to the general population, but remains concentrated in vulnerable populations. This situation presents both a challenge and an opportunity to step up prevention measures to contain the spread of HIV/AIDS in Mexico and in the region.

USAID is the largest bilateral HIV/AIDS donor to Mexico. In 2003, USAID allocated \$2.2 million to HIV/AIDS activities in the country. The Mission supports programs to contain and reduce infection within vulnerable populations and to prevent the spread of HIV to the general population. Assistance is geared toward increasing the impact of HIV prevention strategies by strengthening political will and civic participation in the HIV/AIDS policy environment and by expanding access to services that facilitate safer behavior for the most-at-risk populations. To achieve these objectives, Mission activities fall under these main categories:

- Behavior change activities, including availability of condoms for most-at-risk populations
- Behavioral surveillance
- Reduction of stigma and discrimination associated with HIV/AIDS
- Collaboration with state-level, multisectoral organizations
- Promotion of cross-border (U.S.-Mexico) collaboration on HIV/AIDS

To achieve measurable impact in line with Mexico's national response, USAID/Mexico's HIV funding focuses on specific geographic as well as programmatic areas. The current strategy pinpoints selected sites in central and southern Mexico and on Mexico's border with the United States, as well as trade and migration routes from Central America. Behavior change activities incorporate the ABC approach: A for abstinence, B for being faithful, and C for correct and consistent condom use, as appropriate.

Together with the Pan American Health Organization (PAHO) country office in Mexico, USAID also supports the PAHO/WHO Regional Program on Tuberculosis (TB), which aims to strengthen the joint response of TB and HIV/AIDS programs to the TB/HIV epidemic in the Americas. The program held its second workshop in Mexico City in September 2004, *The Regional Interprogrammatic Meeting on TB/HIV*, which focused on TB/HIV coinfection and collaboration between national TB and HIV/AIDS programs.

Another initiative supported by USAID is the Healthy Border Initiative 2010, a bi-national agenda designed by the United States-Mexico Border Health Commission to facilitate and support community-based solutions for health promotion, disease prevention, and increased access to health services. Reducing the incidence of HIV/AIDS in border areas is one of 11 programmatic focal points. Objectives include the promotion of community-based programs to stem HIV/AIDS transmission, as well as associated risk behaviors such as substance abuse.

### **Monitoring and Evaluation**

USAID supports activities designed to monitor the status of the epidemic, measure the impact of prevention, and provide data for decision-makers in selecting and focusing prevention activities. These activities include:

- Funding a survey, as part of a WHO global research effort, to estimate coverage of key HIV/AIDS services in various public-sector health-care institutions to better focus interventions, advocacy, and resources
- Providing technical assistance to the National AIDS Program to develop Mexico-specific effectiveness rates to help project impact of various HIV/AIDS program interventions and to allow national and state programs to better allocate resources
- Assisting the Mexico City AIDS Program in analyzing and mapping prevalence and socioeconomic data, to determine the pattern of impact and to better focus prevention and treatment programs
- Training staff at selected NGOs in project design, and monitoring and evaluation to make HIV/AIDS interventions more effective

## Policy

Recognizing the importance of a supportive policy environment, USAID activities in Mexico aim to build political will and increase participation by business, community, and civil-society organizations in confronting HIV/AIDS. Activities include:

- Creation of a business council to address HIV/AIDS
- Strengthening multisectoral citizen groups in selected states through advocacy training
- Providing technical support for organizational and advocacy efforts among organizations of people living with HIV/AIDS
- Helping to integrate the issue of gender into HIV-prevention programs by recommending policy changes and training about 40 women, at least half of them HIV-positive, in advocacy, leadership, and gender issues

Other policy-oriented activities—designed to increase access to HIV-prevention services for those most at risk and to protect the human rights of those living with HIV/AIDS—focus on reducing HIV/AIDS stigma and discrimination among health-care providers, policymakers, and other decision-makers in the legal environment and the mass media.

## IMPORTANT LINKS AND CONTACTS

USAID/Mexico, 8700 Mexico City Place, Washington, DC 20521-8700  
(mailing address)

USAID/México, Paseo de la Reforma No. 305, Col. Cuauhtemoc 06500-México D.F., México  
Tel: 52-55-50802000, Fax: 52-55-50802574  
(physical address)

USAID HIV/AIDS website for Mexico:  
[http://www.usaid.gov/our\\_work/global\\_health/aids/Countries/lac/mexico.html](http://www.usaid.gov/our_work/global_health/aids/Countries/lac/mexico.html)

United States Embassy, Paseo de la Reforma 305, Col. Cuauhtemoc, 06500 México, D.F.  
Tel: 52-55-5080-2000

USAID webpage on Mexico: [http://www.usaid.gov/locations/latin\\_america\\_caribbean/country/mexico/](http://www.usaid.gov/locations/latin_america_caribbean/country/mexico/)

Bi-national [U.S./Mexico] Healthy Border Initiative 2010  
[http://www.borderhealth.org/healthy\\_border\\_2010.php?curr=programs](http://www.borderhealth.org/healthy_border_2010.php?curr=programs)

Regional Interprogrammatic Meeting on TB/HIV  
<http://www.paho.org/English/AD/DPC/CD/tb-hiv-2004.htm>

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*For more information, see: [http://www.usaid.gov/our\\_work/global\\_health/aids](http://www.usaid.gov/our_work/global_health/aids)*